BEGINNER

BLUES GURU ROBBEN FORD
Five-Note Freedom

If there's one genre that extends to all forms of American music, it's the blues, and quite frankly, I'm astonished at how strong of a blues revival there has been in the last 20 years. My first inspiration on the guitar was a blues scale that's very basic, yet extremely useful—the open-position E minor pentatonic scale shown in Ex. 1. Just 13 at the time, I instantly fell in love with the scale because it gives you six open strings to jangle around with. I figured out how to use it after hearing "Baby Please Don't Go," the flipside to "Gloria" by Them, featuring Van Morrison. The song had a great guitar solo that that took place mostly in Ex. 1's open E minor position, and it featured exciting British Invasion-style blues licks like the ones in Ex. 2. However, as more advanced guitarists may already know, in a given key there are at least three places on the neck where you can use this pentatonic fingering to create cool riffs and melodies.

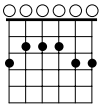
In the key of E, the most commonly used pentatonic scale is probably the minor pentatonic scale we just saw, a shape you can also play up an octave starting in the twelfth position [Ex. 3]. Now, move the pattern to the 9th fret and, remaining in the key of E, you get an E major pentatonic scale [Ex. 4]. This, of course, works beautifully over an E major chord.

Things get more interesting, though, when you try the pentatonic shape in less commonly used places on the neck. For instance, play the shape in the fourth position, and while you could call this a G♯ minor pentatonic scale [Ex.5], in the key of E it becomes a very interesting major scale. Without ever hitting the root, E, all the other notes very conveniently come from the key of E major. You might use these notes over a very pretty Emaj7 chord in phrases like the one in Ex. 6. This approach is really something you'll hear more often in jazz than in rock—though Jimi Hendrix probably played stuff like this on his song "May This Be Love." —As told to Jude Gold

Ford, in a Telecaster mood.

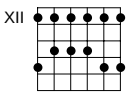
EX. 1

E minor pentatonic scale



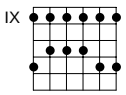
EX. 3

E minor pentatonic scale



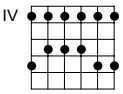
EX. 4

E major pentatonic scale

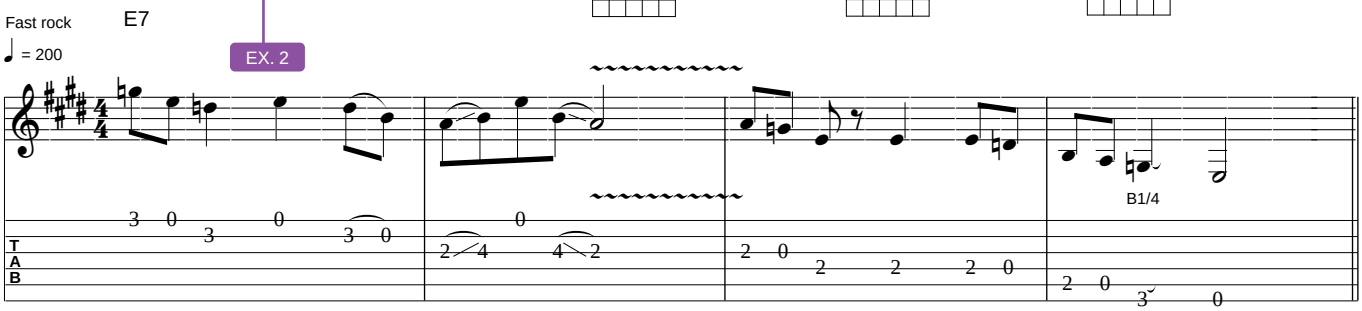


EX. 5

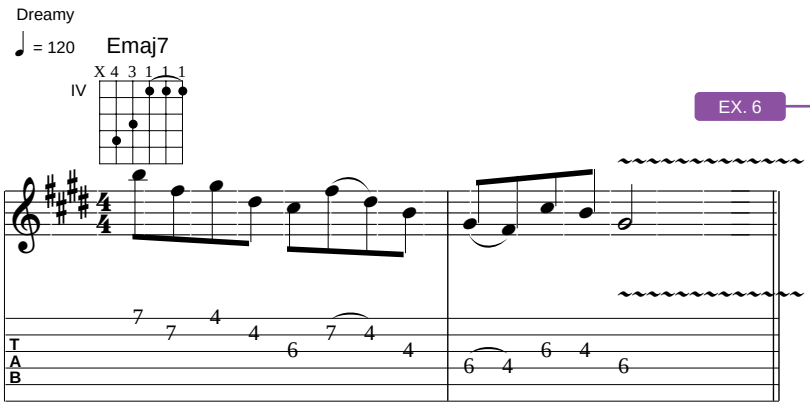
G♯ minor pentatonic scale



EX. 2



EX. 6



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